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Eugene V. Debs

and

Jesus of Nazareth

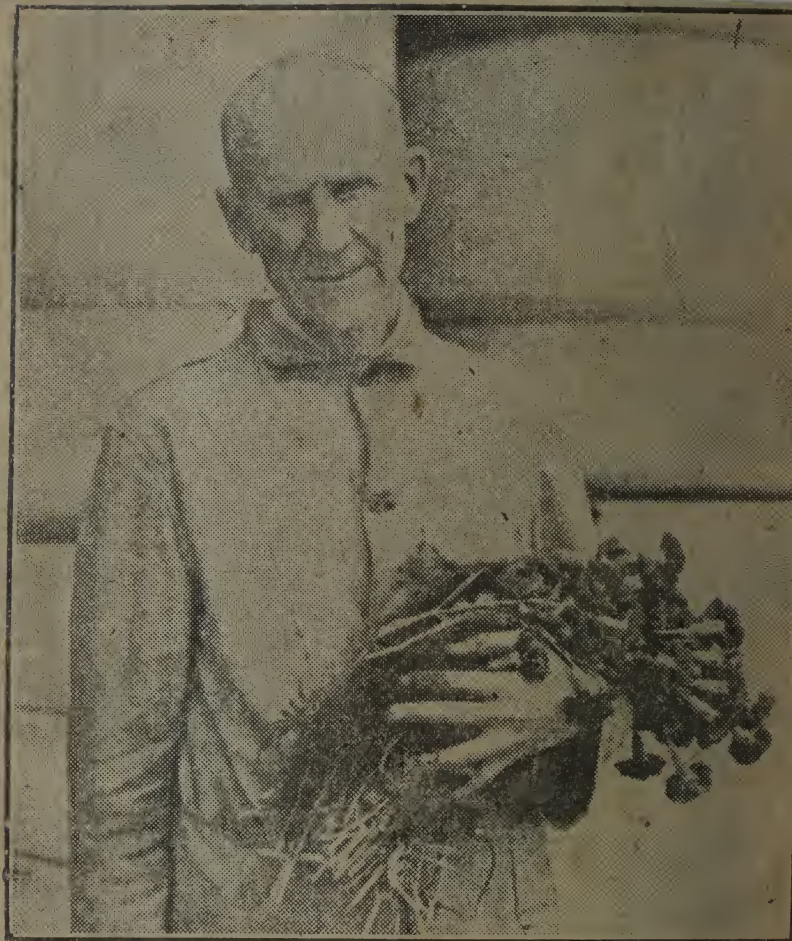


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EUGENE DEBS, the American socialist, spent his Thanksgiving in the penitentiary, despite the many appeals to the White House for his release. Here is his latest photograph, taken in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta.

Nov. 1921

Debs' Speech to The Court

On Saturday morning, September 14, 1918, Eugene V. Debs stood before Judge Westenhaver, in the United States district court at Cleveland, Ohio, and delivered the following address, one of the most eloquent efforts of his career. Debs had been convicted by a jury on September 12 of having violated the Espionage Act by making a speech before the Socialist State Convention, at Canton, Ohio, June 16, 1918.
—Editor.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY WERTZ: If the Court please, I move for the imposition of sentence.

JUDGE WESTENHAVER (to the clerk): You may inquire if the defendant has anything to say.

THE CLERK: Eugene V. Debs, have you anything further to say in your behalf before the Court passes sentence upon you?

EUGENE V. DEBS: Your Honor, years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest of earth. I said then, I say now, that, while there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.

If the Law under which I am convicted is a good Law, then there is no reason why sentence should not be pronounced upon me. I listened to all that was said in this Court in support and justification of this Law, but my mind remains unchanged. I look upon it as a despotic enactment in flagrant conflict with democratic principles and with the spirit of free institutions.

I have no fault to find with this court or with the trial. Everything in connection with this case has been conducted upon a dignified plane and in a respectful and decent spirit—with just one exception. Your honor, my sainted mother inspired me with a reverence for womanhood that amounts to worship. I can think with disrespect of no woman; and I can think with respect of no man who can. I resent the manner in which the names of two noble women were bandied with in this Court. The levity and the wantonness in this instance were absolutely inexcusable. When I think of what was said in this connection I feel that when I pass

a woman, even though it be a sister of the street, I should take off my hat and apologize to her for being a man.

Your honor, I have stated in this Court that I am opposed to the form of our present Government; that I am opposed to the social system in which we live; that I believed in the change of both—but by perfectly peaceable and orderly means.

Let me call your attention to the fact, this morning, that in this system 5 per cent. of our people own and control two-thirds of our wealth; 65 per cent. of the people, embracing the working class that produces all wealth, have but 5 per cent. to show for it.

Standing here this morning, I recall my boyhood. At 14 I went to work in the railroad shops; at 16 I was firing a freight engine on a railroad. I remember all the hardships, all the privations, of that earlier day; and from that time until now my heart has been with the working class. I could have been in Congress long ago. I have preferred to go to prison. The choice has been deliberately made. I could not have done otherwise. I have no regret.

In the struggle—the unceasing struggle—between the toilers and producers and their exploiters I have tried, as best I might, to serve those among whom I was born, with whom I expect to share my lot until the end of my days.

I am thinking this morning of the men in the mills and factories; I am thinking of the women who, for a paltry wage, are compelled to work out their lives; of the little children who, in this system, are robbed of their childhood and in their early, tender years are seized in the remorseless grasp of Mammon and forced into the industrial dungeons, there to feed the machines while they themselves are being starved, body and soul. I can see them dwarfed, diseased, stunted, their little lives broken, and their hopes blasted, because in this high noon of our twentieth century civilization money is still so much more important than human life. Gold is god, and rules in the affairs of men. The little girls—and there are a million of them in this country—this, the most favored land beneath the bending skies; a land in which we have vast areas of rich and fertile soil, material resources in inexhaustible abundance, the most marvellous productive machinery on earth, millions of eager workers ready to apply their labor to that machinery to produce an abundance for every man, woman and child—

and if there are still many millions of our people who are victims of poverty, whose life is a ceaseless struggle all the way from youth to age, until at last death comes to their rescue and stills the aching heart, and lulls the victim to dreamless sleep, it is not the fault of the Almighty; it can't be charged to nature. It is due entirely to an outgrown social system that ought to be abolished, not only in the interest of the working class, but in a higher interest of all humanity.

When I think of these little children—the girls that are in the textile mills of all descriptions in the East, in the cotton factories of the South; when I think of them at work when they ought to be at play or at school, when I think that when they do grow up, if they live long enough to approach the marriage state, they are unfit for it; their nerves are worn out, their tissue is exhausted, their vitality is spent. They have been fed to industry. Their lives have been coined into gold. Their offspring are born tired. That is why there are so many failures in our modern life.

Your Honor, the 5 per cent. of the people that I have made reference to constitute that element that absolutely rules our country. They privately own all our public necessities. They wear no crowns; they wield no scepters; they sit upon no thrones; and yet they are our economic masters and our political rulers. They control this Government and all of its institutions. They control the Courts.

And, Your Honor, if you will permit me, I wish to make just one correction. It was stated here that I had charged that all Federal Judges are crooks. The charge is absolutely untrue. I did say that all Federal Judges are appointed through the influence and power of the capitalist class, and not the working class. If that statement is not true, I am more than willing to retract it.

Of the 5 per cent. of our people who own and control all the sources of wealth, all of the nation's industries, all of the means of our common life, it is they who declare war; it is they who make peace; it is they who control our destiny. And, so long as this is true, we can make no just claim to being a democratic Government—a self-governing people.

I believe, Your Honor, in common with all Socialists, that this nation ought to own and control its industries. I believe, as all Socialists do, that all things that are jointly needed and used ought to be jointly owned; that industry,

the basis of life, instead of being the private property of the few and operated for their enrichment, ought to be the common property of all, democratically administered in the interest of all.

John D. Rockefeller has today an income of \$60,000,000 a year—\$5,000,000 a month, \$200,000 a day. He does not produce a penny of it. I make no attack upon Mr. Rockefeller personally. I do not in the least dislike him. If he were in need, and it were in my power to serve him, I should serve him as gladly as I would any other human being. I have no quarrel with Mr. Rockefeller personally, nor with any other capitalist. I am simply opposing a social order in which it is possible for one man who does absolutely nothing that is useful to amass a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, while millions of men and women who work all of the days of their lives secure barely enough for an existence.

This order of things cannot always endure. I have registered my protest against it. I recognize the feebleness of my effort, but, fortunately, I am not alone. There are multiplied thousands of others who, like myself, have come to realize that before we may truly enjoy the blessings of civilized life we must reorganize society upon a mutual and co-operative basis; and to this end we have organized a great economic and political movement that spreads over the face of all the earth.

There are today upward of 60,000,000 Socialists—loyal, devoted adherents to this cause, regardless of nationality, race, creed, color or sex. They are all making common cause. They are all spreading the propaganda of the new social order. They are waiting, watching and working through all the weary hours of the day and night. They are still in the minority. They have learned how to be patient and abide their time. They feel—they know, indeed—that the time is coming, in spite of all opposition, all persecution, when this emancipating gospel will spread among all the peoples, and when this minority will become the triumphant majority, and, sweeping into power, inaugurate the greatest change in history.

In that day we will have the universal commonwealth—not the destruction of the nation, but, on the contrary, the harmonious co-operation of every nation with every other nation on earth. In that day war will curse this earth no more.

I have been accused, Your Honor, of being an enemy of the soldier. I hope I am laying no flattering unction to my soul when I say that I don't believe the soldier has a more sympathetic friend than I am. If I had my way, there would be no soldier. But I realize the sacrifices they are making, Your Honor. I can think of them. I can feel for them. I can sympathize with them. That is one of the reasons why I have been doing what little has been in my power to bring about a condition of affairs in this country worthy of the sacrifices they have made and that they are now making in its behalf.

Your Honor, in a local paper, yesterday, there was some editorial exultation about my prospective imprisonment. I do not resent it in the least. I can understand it perfectly. In the same paper there appears an editorial, this morning, that has in it a hint of the wrong to which I have been trying to call attention. (Reading): "A Senator of the United States receives a salary of \$7,500—\$45,000 for the six years for which he is elected. One of the candidates for Senator from a State adjoining Ohio is reported to have spent through his committee \$150,000 to secure the nomination. For advertising he spent \$35,000; for printing, \$30,000; for travelling expenses, \$10,000, and the rest in ways known to political managers."

"The theory is that public office is as open to a poor man as to a rich man. One may easily imagine, however, how slight a chance one of ordinary resources would have in a contest against this man, who was willing to spend more than three times his six years' salary merely to secure nomination. Were these conditions to hold in every State, the Senate would soon become again what it was once held to be—a rich man's club."

"Campaign expenditures have been the subject of much restrictive legislation in recent years, but it has not always reached the mark. The authors of primary reform have accomplished some of the things they set out to do, but they have not yet taken the bank roll out of politics."

They never will take it out of politics—they never can take it out of politics—in this system.

Your Honor, I wish to make acknowledgment of my thanks to the counsel for the defense. They have not only defended me with exceptional legal ability, but with a personal attachment and devotion of which I am deeply sensible, and which I can never forget.

Your Honor, I ask no mercy. I plead for no immunity. I realize that finally the right must prevail. I never more clearly comprehend than now the great struggle between the powers of greed on the one hand and upon the other the rising hosts of freedom.

I can see the dawn of a better day of humanity. The people are awakening. In due course of time they will come to their own.

When the mariner, sailing over tropic seas, looks for relief from his weary watch, he turns his eyes toward the Southern cross, burning luridly above the tempest-vexed ocean. As the midnight approaches, the Southern cross begins to bend, and the whirling worlds change their places, and, with starry finger-points, the Almighty marks the passage of time upon the dial of the universe, and, though no bell may beat the glad tidings, the lookout knows that the midnight is passing—that relief and rest are close at hand.

Let the people take heart and hope everywhere, for the cross is bending, the midnight is passing, and joy cometh with the morning.

He is true to God who is true to man. Wherever wrong is done to the humblest and the weakest 'neath the all-beholding sun, that wrong is also done to us; and they are slaves most base whose love of right is for themselves and not for all the race.

Your Honor, I thank you, and I thank all of this Court for their courtesy, for their kindness, which I shall remember always.

I am prepared to receive your sentence.

The Court then sentenced Eugene V. Debs to 10 years' imprisonment at the West Virginia State Penitentiary, at Moundsville, the Federal Prison at Atlanta, Ga., being too crowded to receive him.

—THE CALL MAGAZINE.

Jesus The Supreme Leader

(By EUGENE V. DEBS)

It matters little whether Jesus was born at Nazareth or Bethlehem. The accounts conflict, but the point is of no consequence.

It is of consequence, however, that he was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. This fact of itself, about which there is no question, certifies conclusively the proletarian character of Jesus Christ. Had his parents been other than poor working people—money-changers, usurers, merchants, lawyers, scribes, priests or other parasites—he would not have been delivered from his mother's womb on a bed of straw in a stable among asses and other animals.

Was Jesus divinely begotten? Yes, the same as every other babe ever born into the world. He was of miraculous origin, the same as all the rest of mankind. The scriptural account of his "immaculate conception" is a beautiful myth, but scarcely more of a miracle than the conception of all other babies.

Jesus was not divine because he was less human than his fellow-men, but for the opposite reason, that he was supremely human, and it is this of which his divinity consists, the fullness and perfection of him as an intellectual, moral and spiritual human being.

The chronicles of his time and of later days are filled with contradictory and absurd stories about him, and he has been disfigured and distorted by cunning priests to serve their knavish ends, and by ignorant idolaters to give godly sanction to their blind bigotry and savage superstition, but there is no impenetrable myth surrounding the personality of Jesus Christ. He was not a legendary being or an allegorical figure, but as Bouck White and others have shown us, a flesh and blood man in the fullness of his matchless powers and the completeness of his transcendent consecration.

To me Jesus Christ is as real, as palpitant and pervasive as a historic character as John Brown, Abraham

Lincoln or Karl Marx. He has persisted, in spite of 2,000 years of theological emasculation to destroy his revolutionary personality, and is today the greatest moral force in the world.

The vain attempt persisted in through 20 centuries of ruling class interpolation, interpretation and falsification to make Jesus appear the divinely commissioned conservator of the peace and soother of the oppressed, instead of the master proletarian revolutionist and sower of the social whirlwind—the vain attempt to prostitute the name and teachings and example of the martyred Christ to the power of Mammon, the very power which had murdered him in cold blood, vindicates his transcendent genius and proclaims the immortality of his work.

Nothing is known of Jesus Christ as a lad except that at 12 his parents took him to Jerusalem, where he confounded the learned doctors by the questions he asked them. We have no knowledge as to what these questions were, but taking his lowly birth, his poverty and suffering into account, in contrast with the riches of Jerusalem which now dazzled his vision, and in the light of his subsequent career, we are not left to conjecture as to the nature of the interrogation to which the inquisitive lad subjected the smug doctors in the temple.

There are but meagre accounts of the doings of Jesus until at a trifle over 30 he entered upon his public "ministry" and began the campaign of agitation and revolt he had been planning and dreaming through all the years of his yearning and burning adolescence. He was of the working class and loyal to it in every drop of his hot blood to the very hour of his death. He hated and denounced the rich and cruel exploiter as passionately as he loved and sympathized with his poor and suffering victims.

"I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen," was his class-conscious announcement to his disciples, all of whom were of the proletariat; not an exploiter or desirable citizen among them. No, not one! It was a working class movement he was organizing and a working class revolution he was preparing the way for.

"A new commandment I give unto you: That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." This was the pith and core of all his pleading, all his preaching, and all his teaching—love one another, be

brethren, make common cause, stand together, ye who labor to enrich the parasites and are yourselves in chains, and ye shall be free!

These words were addressed by Jesus, not to the money-changers, the scribes and pharisees, the rich and respectable, but to the ragged undesirables of his own enslaved and suffering class. This appeal was to their class spirit, their class loyalty and their class solidarity.

Centuries later Karl Marx embodies the appeal in his famous manifesto and today it blazes forth in letters of fire as the watchword of the world-wide revolution: **"Workers of all countries, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to gain."**

During the brief span of these years, embracing the whole period of his active life, from the time he began to stir up the people until "the scarlet robe and crown of thorns were put on him and he was crucified between two thieves," Jesus devoted all his time and all his matchless ability and energies to the suffering poor, and it would have been passing strange if they had not "heard him gladly."

He himself had no fixed abode, and like the wretched, motley throng to whom he preached and poured out his great and loving heart, he was a poor wanderer on the face of the earth and "had nowhere to lay his head."

Pure communism was the economic and social gospel preached by Jesus Christ, and every act and utterance which may properly be ascribed to him conclusively affirms it. Private property was to his elevated mind and exalted soul a sacrilege and a horror; an insult to God and a crime against man.

The economic basis of his doctrine of brotherhood and love is clearly demonstrated in the fact that under his leadership and teaching all his disciples **"sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need,"** and that they **"had all things in common."**

"And they, continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."

This was the beginning of the mighty movement Jesus had launched for the overthrow of the empire of the Caesars and the emancipation of the crushed and miserable masses from the bestial misrule of the Roman tyrants.

It was, above all, a working class movement and was conceived and brought forth for no other purpose than to destroy class rule and set up the common people as the sole and rightful inheritors of the earth.

"Happy are the lowly, for they shall inherit the earth."

Three short years of agitation by the incomparable Jesus was sufficient to stamp the proletarian movement he had inaugurated as the most formidable and portentous revolution in the annals of time. The ill-fated author could not long survive his stupendous mischief. The aim and inevitable outcome of this madman's teaching and agitation was too clearly manifest to longer admit of doubt.

The sodden lords of misrule trembled in their stolen finery, and then the word went forth that they must "get" the vagabond who had stirred up the people against them. The prototypes of Peabody. McPartland, Harry Orchard et al were all ready for their base and treacherous performance and their 30 pieces of blood-stained silver. The priest of the Mammon worshippers gave it out that the Nazarene was spreading a false religion and that his pernicious teachings would corrupt the people, destroy the church, uproot the old faith, disrupt the family, break up the home and overthrow society.

The lineal descendants of Caiaphas and Judas and the money-changers and pharisees of old are still parroting the same miserable falsehood to serve the same miserable ends, the only difference being that the brood of pious perverts now practice their degeneracy in the name of Christ they betrayed and sold into crucifixion 20 centuries ago.

Jesus, after the most farcial trial and the most shocking travesty upon justice, was spiked to the cross at the gates of Jerusalem, and his followers were subjected to persecution, torture, exile and death. The movement he had inaugurated, fired by his unconquerable revolutionary spirit, persisted, however, through fire and slaughter, for three centuries and until the master class, realizing the futility of their efforts to stamp it out, basely betrayed it by pretending conversion to its teachings and reverence for its murdered founder, and from that time forth Christianity became the religion, so-called, of the pagan ruling class, and the dead Christ was metamorphosed from the master revolutionist who was ignominiously slain, a martyr to his class, into the pious abstraction, the harmless theological

divinity who died that John Jierpont Morgan could be "washed in the blood of the lamb," and countless generations of betrayed and deluded slaves kept blinded by superstition and content in their poverty and degradation.

Jesus was the grandest and loftiest of human souls—sun-crowned and God-inspired; a full-statured man, red-blooded and lion-hearted, yet sweet and gentle as the noble mother who had given him birth.

He has the majesty and poise of a God, the prophetic vision of a seer, the great, loving heart of a woman, and the unaffected innocence and simplicity of a child.

This was and is the martyred Christ of the working class, the inspired evangel of the down-trodden masses, the world's supreme revolutionary leader, whose love for the poor and the children of the poor hallowed all the days of his consecrated life, lighted up and made forever holy the dark tragedy of his death, and gave to the age his divine inspiration and his deathless name.

—THE CALL MAGAZINE,

Christmas Number, 1917.

